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## HENRY JAMES, THE SEER.

BY CAROLINE ELIOT LACKLAND.

Henry James spoke his message to mankind with no uncertain voice. He saw creation from the creative side: "Given the Creator, to find the creature." He admits that, in his warfare against Science and Philosophy, he stands before the organized world of Sense and Science as did David before Goliath, "his only weapon a simple sling and pebble." He scorned to win recognition through a coterie of flatterers, or a literary ring. He stood alone, defending what seemed to him the right path to truth, against opposing thousands. In trumpet-tones of warning and remonstrance, oftentimes with bitterness and harsh impatience, he struck the knotted scourge of his sarcasm upon the necks of those who aroused his anger or contempt. Prophets and reformers live before their day, and Henry James proved no exception to the rule: "Now being dead, he speaketh!" and ears before closed, through pride or prejudice, are opened to receive his words.

Mr. James was born in Albany, June 3, 1811. He was educated at the public schools, at Union College, and at Princeton Theological Seminary. For some time he also studied law. Possessing an independent fortune, he surrendered himself to studies best suited to his peculiar turn of thought. His co-workers in intellectual research and reform were Emerson, Parker, William Lloyd Garrison, Ripley, Horace Greeley, Thoreau, Alcott, and Margaret Fuller. From obituary notices I learn that he passed much time with Carlyle, Tennyson, Mill, and Lewes. But to his profound study of the writings of Swedenborg he owed the greatest influence that directed the course of his life and teachings. He impressed the fact upon his readers that Swedenborg himself would have abhorred an ecclesiasticism built upon his own name, and claimed that his (Swedenborg's) doctrines should be infused into, and adopted by, all Christian sects (as indeed they more or less, consciously or unconsciously, have been!) After his remarkable lectures on Moralism and Christianity, Mr. James published, in 1854, his book entitled "The Church of God not an Ecclesiasticism"; in 1855, "The Nature of Evil"; in 1857, "Christianity

the Logic of Creation"; in 1866, "Substance and Shadow." Three years later he published "The Secret of Swedenborg." His last published work was in 1879—"Society the Redeemed Form of Man." For many years he lived in Cambridge, Mass., but returned to Boston, where he died, December 19th, at 71 years of age, after a month's illness. His two sons are well known in literary circles, one being Professor William James, of Harvard, the other Henry James, Jr., the novelist. In person, Mr. James was short, erect, with a noble head, and keen, searching eyes; affectionate, witty, sarcastic, humorous, he let each mood of his character tell for his life-work without fear or servility. Sweeping the moral atmosphere with electric and devastating force, and anon descending like refreshing rain upon souls athirst for spiritual truth, he was alike unmoved by misapprehension or contumely.

To the Mother Church alone he conceded the right of an Ecclesiasticism. As a conservator of the Faith, but of the Faith not yet revealed or understood, but typified, and, in its first inception, outlived! he looked upon Ecclesiasticism as only the husk, containing the precious kernel conserved unto the fulness of time; he valued the Church as the sacred casket that had protected and preserved certain unrealized and unmeasured treasures far more precious than the casket itself, and (I quote from another) "he believed that the spiritual verities held for the race in earthen vessels of ecclesiasticism, and established philosophy, transcend the sphere of that which held them, and only can be interpreted and accepted by advanced spiritual comprehension." If, however (he says), we are to have *any* Ecclesiasticism, let it be that which has come down to us hoary with human use; which is associated with the world's best names and memories, which has always (in spite of a thousand infirmities) pillowed the revered head of age, diffused a timely awe in the heart of childhood, nursed the sentiment of human brotherhood, until (mark this), until science has grown intelligent enough to grasp it, and which is still capable of expanding to all the ritual needs likely to be begotten of a larger spirit; we want no newness of the letter, but only a newness of spirit.

He believed that the established theology was entirely incompetent to deal with the vital, fundamental question of the Nature and Origin of Evil! In answer to a lady of St. Louis, who wrote

to learn from him his views respecting miracles, he asserted that he "believed and upheld the truth and necessity of miracles as facts of *human* nature! *Not material facts* belonging to scientific understanding, but purely metaphysical facts, half-way between flesh and spirit," and, as he says, only recognizable to the spiritual understanding which uses them as *ultimates* merely of truth; the word "miracle," he says, "expresses unlimited action in the subject of it, which means a power of acting above Nature—**MERE NATURE**. Nature cannot impose a limit upon human nature, and when human nature rises to the point of transcending mere nature it is a *divine* act of the divine side of man over the natural. Christ we therefore accept as Divine, and he alone transcended, to this great degree, the side of Nature. The miraculous evidences may not be scientific; they may declare the senses incompetent, but sense has no authority in religious things. Miracle has spiritual truth behind it, and needs not to depend on 'sense.' It would lose all force did it require 'sense' to attest its verity."

Mr. James's private letters to his friends reveal a tenderness and sweetness of nature in strong contrast to his often defiant public utterances; he believed in social determination, in finding the real life outside of one's selfhood! Immortal life to him meant the absorption of his conscious personality or selfhood into universal interest, or Race interest. To find one's neighbor in the highest sense is at once to lose and find one's self. He honored the impulse of good in the heart rather than the intellectual perception of truth. With regard to certain views of philosophers in respect to the private subjectivity of selfhood, Mr. James writes to Mr. Abbot: "This private subjectivity of selfhood which *you* affirm and *I* deny is not the least identical with you or me regarded as subjects of life or consciousness, but only as subjects of a certain vicious ontology, or a conventional science of being, among men, by which we are supposed to possess spiritual life or being in ourselves directly or primarily, and in our race or nature quite derivatively or secondarily.

Selfhood is not inherent in our consciousness or real life. Mr. James says of himself: "I am willing to avow myself an abject Christian," meaning that he recognizes himself to be but a mould or form, into which the divine influx can penetrate; the effort of the soul to perfect itself *for* itself is to him the acme of refined selfish-

ness; to join with God in love for others is the immortal life of the soul. To live simply *to save one's soul* is a suicidal separation from the divine principle of spontaneous love! The immortal consciousness of the individual soul he never disputes, but that immortal life can be gained by working for it with the latent thought of one's own place in the kingdom as the inspiring motive he refuses to concede. The soldier in battle, whose courage and devotion are due to personal ambition, may die at the cannon's mouth, but his cause is a lost one, in every sense. The religious hypocrite loses this world and the next as well, his sacrifice of self being upon the altar of his own selfishness. "The unitary mind of man, as involving all time (the race mind), is its only true subject; and its only true object, as including all space, is the universe of existing things; you and I cannot, as individuals, lay claim to any real selfhood, since this is the arrogance of Adam and Eve, seeking in and of themselves to be like unto gods and a law unto themselves." Man cannot claim to have life in himself when there can be but one life which cannot be divided; individual souls cannot contain life in and of themselves without becoming individual Gods, and there is but one God, one Life, out of whom proceeds the influx that informs his *human* creatures with power to comprehend the meaning of free choice, and to freely choose union with divine nature, through the potentiality of human nature, or to freely choose separation from God by union with animal, physical nature alone. Mr. James says, therefore, "You and I, consequently, can never constitute either our own true subjectivity or our own true objectivity, since in the former event we oust the unitary mind of man, and in the latter we displace the universe of existence." "Selfhood is a strictly subjective illusion in man—an illusion primarily in the sphere of feeling and thence of thought. You can only deny this by denying his creatureship. Man is, in virtue of the creative perfection, a rigidly social form of life or consciousness. True Religion is not the effort of a man to perfect himself, but to give himself, for others."

Having only recently begun the study of the writings of Mr. James, I am unwilling to risk going entirely out of my depth by speaking at large of his remarkable works; their meaning I have only been able to seize in glimpses, for their brilliancy perplexes, whilst throwing marvellous light. One point, however, and a most

important and pivotal one, of his philosophy I am trying to present for consideration at this time—viz., the views of Henry James respecting the nature and origin of evil. His earliest intellectual research was to satisfy his own mind, and subsequently that of others, as to how evil in the creature could consist with perfection of the Creator. Neither Orthodoxy nor Philosophy availed him here; both (as he says) taught a complete independence between Creator and Creature in order to the very inception of evil. "To prove this independence was to legitimate every issue of it." The solution of the problem he found satisfactorily and permanently through the development of the ideas he drew from the teachings of Swedenborg. His own philosophy was based upon these teachings, yet was quite a thing in itself notwithstanding. That this problem of evil still remained unsolved, proved that the question still remained unanswered as to how a dependent creature of God comes into such relations of independence as to arouse in man's bosom a sentiment of responsibility. The pride of selfhood is the basis of evil (evil as incidental to good). Man imagines himself to be something, because God in his creative Love has elevated human nature beyond mere nature, that he might therefrom create unto himself children, likenesses, derivations, *not duplicates*, of Himself! Out of nature God has evolved a being capable of spiritual life. That which is mere nature, with all its various stages of change, formation, and reproduction, cannot and does not contain the mould of moralism out of which the human being is born again into spirituality. The natural man is, however, as much a mould or form, as passive a receptacle as related to God, as is the mineral in its relation to the touch of life above it. Man is the highest organic animal into whom is breathed the breath of life, spiritually speaking, but still *into* whom it *is breathed*! To himself he is not a law, although his pride of imagined real selfhood causes him to think that he is; neither is he a mere puppet, since he is a moral being, a prepared receptacle for God's inflowing spiritual life; but he must learn to look outside of himself for his soul's life and its informing powers. He must, like Abraham, bring, to the altar of his discovered consciousness of choice of obedience to God or obedience to Nature, the sacrifice of his dearest natural self, his very inmost self, his pride of selfhood.

To eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is when man

mistakes his natural instinct and pride of selfhood and regards his consciousness and potentiality as an actuality in himself. To eat of this forbidden fruit is to imagine the mould, or the receptive and prepared human nature, to be the divine nature. "Self-consciousness, which is the *natural* human (mark this, not the *divine* human) form of consciousness, is born of the union of the *will* and the *instinct*. Man in such a sense becomes both objective and subjective to himself, but strictly within the bounds of the *natural human*! He is the subject of his nature in the realm of sense, and the object of it in the realm of ideas." His understanding, his metaphysical being, constitute the basis of his receptivity, of God's divine influx. The newly born human body is physically prepared with lungs which receive the air at its birth. This in-breathing establishes the physical life of its animal existence; his awakening intelligence and consciousness of power of choice constitute his human nature. Into this mould flows the influx of God, the divine breathing, and man becomes a living soul, informed by the divine spirit.

Evil is incident to good as the darkness is to the light; it is not a thing in itself, but is made to seem so by man's perversion of God's plan. Man is a trinity of being within himself, when following God's will, and thereby he becomes a likeness, a child. Selfhood, as he seems to possess it, reveals a moral basis within himself; he sees intelligently that he has choice. Instinct in the animal is its only guide to choice of food and environment. No moral basis lies in the merely animal nature; it can do no right or wrong. It cannot be conscious of a higher nature, possessing it not. Good and evil are alike unknown to it, and right and wrong have no basis in its being; in the animal, as animal, is no receptacle for Spirit (or divine influx). The human natural is the mould into which God flows, and in conjunction with whom man becomes a child of God. From thenceforth, from the creation of the first man, there arises a being with divine as well as animal instinct. The soul yearns and seeks for God as naturally as the body seeks food. Adam's, or human nature's first existence, was perforce a state of innocence. God saw that his last creative act, that should link the race unto himself, was good. The equilibrium of man's "moralism," as Henry James terms it (for his vernacular is peculiar to himself), "the equilibrium of man's moralism was

perfect." Man was innocent, but not yet virtuous, and virtue must be the result of experience and choice.

Man had as yet neither committed sin, omitted performance of duty, nor practiced goodness; inherent in his being lay the power of intelligent choice; this would enable him to become angel or demon; he had not yet had the experience of ages to supplement his intelligence; his gift of free choice seemed to him as a part of himself, self-bestowed, to be self-asserted; he did not realize the Giver of choice, only the choice! From the moment that man's receptivity as human is accomplished he is prepared for the inflowing of the Divine life. The plant feels the inflowing warmth of the sun; the stone is dead to its rays; the one is prepared to receive, the other remains unchanged. Shall the clay, as it turns on the wheel, say, "I turn," and not "I am turned"? Shall the planet say, "I shine," and not rather, "from the Sun I receive my all"? There is but one Life, and while it cannot be divided it can be communicated, even as the vine sends life into its branches. Man as human is created free, for God wishes no slaves. His children are his joyous servitors, his thankful recipients, realizing that they need his glory, which they can neither increase nor lessen. First innocent, then aliens, then idolaters (or blind seekers after God), then under revealed Law, again under the Gospel of the Redeemer, the race has stood before, gone from, and is now returning to God! Race interest, Race redemption, universal Divine Natural Humanity, is to be the outcome of creation.

God never created Evil as Evil. It is an incident to good, necessitated as shade to substance. God never meant alienation from himself as a path to himself. There is no departing from him but to fall. The laws of spiritual as well as physical gravitation prevent "a falling up." To say that God should have created man so that evil would have been impossible is an absurd blasphemy. The whole trend of his creative power is to elevate Nature into Human Nature, and Human Nature into the Divine Nature. All Nature is innocent; man alone is virtuous. Human Nature can, through Almighty God's abounding love, rise into spiritual life, and *can* depart from it, if the Fatherhood of God is rejected and scorned. The reversion of God's mighty wheel of purpose, the going back by human nature to Nature, is the unpardonable sin, and is to grieve away the Holy Spirit. Man is



free, if he so wills, to take the safe incline by which God drew him heavenward as a path of headlong departure from God! Is Nature in itself evil, since it is the necessary basis for human nature? Is freedom sin, when it is the basis for spiritual life? Man cannot originate the elements out of which he chooses his destiny; he is alike unable to create the primary conditions for his rise toward God, or his fall from him. The Redeemer opened the eyes of man's soul to the sins of his spirit. The deepest sinfulness lies in a *state of the soul*. Adultery and murder may be as effectually committed (so far as the soul is concerned) as the very acts of crime. It must be God who joins together, where sacramental marriage is, and there is no real death but the death unto righteousness.

Those who would study Mr. James must look for a diamond in the very rough! His vernacular is confusing and thwarting; one must dig for his fine gold, and it comes in blinding dust as well as in nuggets. Mr. James could never have been a popular writer; he uses neither tact nor diplomacy in rooting out error. That he boldly attacked an ecclesiasticism built upon the name of Swedenborg disturbed the spiritual pride of those who claimed, as did the Jews, a monopoly of enlightenment and blessing. This frozen lake of spiritual pride could never bind his warm and glowing sympathies. But he did not lay claim to saintliness, and realized his own limitations to their fullest extent. At this day of adjustment—when the new is opening up the hidden treasures of the old, when past and present join hands to sift truth from error, when transition is enlightenment, and disintegration is not real but seeming—the long-asked questions of the How and Why with regard to Creation, the Nature of Evil, the divine humanity of Christ, are questions answered! One by one the forms of dogma conserved by the old ecclesiasticism declare themselves as only “sacred vessels,” in that the inner truth they hold has been veiled until Science, Philosophy, and Religion should together break their seal. The Holy Ghost, the Spirit, and combined and united influence of all truth, still broods in active and enlightening force over the chaos of mingled truth and error in men's minds. Theologians, Scientists, Philosophers, are but the divided fingers of the all-containing hand of truth, upon and within which each, in God's good time, shall rest at last in Unity of Faith and brotherhood.